

# TIME HAS COME WHEN WE NEED A DRAMATIC CENSOR.

Alan Dale Points Out That the English Law Regulating Plays Would Prevent the Vicious Spectacle Which Is Disgusting New York at the Manhattan Theatre.

on the fingers of the ill-fated people in his imported birth-producers, and other managers have taken care to "ve" as mental bathing suits when it was a question of wading through the billows of French propriety. But Messrs. Brady & Ziegfeld, Jr. (what will be when he's a senator?) have done nothing at all. They have appeared boldly, candidly to "hidden depths" that Anglo-Saxon propriety insists upon keeping in darkness, and, as I said last Tuesday, I

you? and next day she may meet her chance acquaintance, who will say: "I saw you last night at the Manhattan. You seemed to be enjoying yourself. For my part I don't see how you could possibly have laughed at such indecency." Or she may meet her pet aversion, Miss Snip, who is fifty in the shade and very proper. And Miss Snip will say: "My brother took me to the Manhattan last night, and I imagine that it was a most improper show. Of course I myself didn't understand it, but brother did, and took me away. I wanted to stay because I saw you there, and you seemed to like it!" Which is very comfortable!

Then, again, the woman who tells her friends that she didn't see anything in "The Turtle" writes herself down as a fool, or tacitly admits that she will countenance that kind of thing; otherwise why did she stay through the performance? Few people who have paid out their good money for an evening's entertainment care to get up and leave the house. Once there, they stay there. Moreover, their enemies will always hold the newspapers

## BRITISH CENSORSHIP LAW.

An act for regulating theatres. 22d August, 1843.

ONE copy of every new stage play, and of every new act, scene or other part added to any old stage play, and of every new prologue or epilogue intended to be produced and acted for hire at any theatre in Great Britain, shall be sent to the Lord Chamberlain of Her Majesty's household for the time being, seven days at least before the first act or presenting thereof, and during the said seven days no person shall for hire act or present the same or cause the same to be acted or presented.

It shall be lawful for the Lord Chamberlain, for the time being, whenever he shall be of opinion that it is fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace to do so, to forbid the acting or presenting any stage play.

Every person who for hire shall act or present or cause to be acted or presented any new stage play until the same shall have been allowed by him, and also every person who for hire shall act any such play contrary to such prohibition as aforesaid shall for every such offense forfeit such sum as shall be awarded by the court in which or the justices by whom he shall be convicted, not exceeding the sum of fifty pounds; and every license (in case there be any such) by or under which the theatre was opened in which such an offense shall have been committed shall become absolutely void.



THE question of advisability of a dramatic censorship in New York has been receiving some attention from the "thinkers" of the community. It has been flashed upon them by the fact that the unsexed Parisian face has at last forced a production on this sober, guileless community. Messrs. Brady & Ziegfeld, Jr. (the "Junior" affix seems distinctly out of place), in giving us "The Turtle" at the Manhattan Theatre, have assumed that there was little difference between the communities of New York and Paris. They have arrived at the conclusion—I don't know how—that we are not nearly as good as we are supposed to be, and their millinery farce all pepper and spice—has been boldly offered to our prying Lullies and Dulcineas. A censor would have interfered with this conclusion.

A play like "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" would never harm a maiden of blushing sixteen, because it treats the problems of life seriously and poetically, but in "The Turtle" everything is risqué and coarse. You must either laugh at it or be disgusted with it. There is no middle course, and there isn't a girl or woman who would dare to be seen laughing at it, but laughter would suggest the fact that she condoned the boldness of the disrobing act, and the unusual indecency of the second act.

The dramatic censor who, in London, sits on a mental pinnacle, and exudes morality at all his pores for the benefit of perplexed and myopic managers, is not a very popular person on the other side. In the case of the Bernard Shaw censure, have insisted that such a censor is a distinct obstacle in the way of dramatic progress, and various playwrights own long lists of grievances that they are willing to ventilate upon the slightest provocation.

The censor doesn't enjoy himself very much. No man enjoys the reputation of being an impediment. But the censor remains, and thoughtful Buffons have given him their implicit confidence. Occasionally, he seems to nap, for even upon the London stage, the proprietors are occasionally shocked. But, as a rule, this particular gentleman does considerable good, and although his existence looks, at first sight, like an infringement of individual liberty, he is kept particularly and persistently busy. When it is borne in mind that the theatrical profession is one that caters to very mixed crowds and that the peculiar question is, in the eyes of managers, very naturally a most important one, it really does seem as though the approval or disapproval of a person, appointed to sit up aloft, like the little cherub, and dispense proprieties, might be absolutely necessary.

New York has no censor. New York, keen in the belief that absolute liberty is the wisest course, relies exclusively upon the press. But it has come to pass in this community that a censorious criticism is looked upon as a good "advertisement" by the wily managers, and if the critic, genuinely honest says, "Don't go and see that show, for it is wicked," the manager displays his advice in large type, and the men, convinced that forbidden fruit is the sweetest, flock.

Careful Frohmans have employed their own censors—sedate gentlemen to localize the Parisianism of French farces, and we have had them shown of much of their indecency. An astute Daly has invariably placed a wedding ring

don't believe that Americans have been educated down to that sort of thing. There is not very much use in waxing indignant, or in indulging in invective. Perhaps Messrs. Brady and Ziegfeld, Jr. have forgotten the make-up of a New York audience. I don't see why they should have done so, but managers—in their efforts to secure "money-makers" and "sensations"—are sometimes a trifle forgetful. In London the censor applies stirrups to such faded memories. A New York audience is a collection of ornate men and women—particularly women—who are out to see and to be seen. Of course, you understand that when they buy their tickets they do so in order to see, but you may not realize the fact that they are equally anxious to be seen. And they are. Women invest in theatre toilettes, and Solomon in all his glory was never more gorgeous than the feminine theatre-goer of New York. At the Empire, at Daly's, at the Lyceum, the costumes worn in the audience rival the luxurious confections of London and Paris. Women in New York go to the theatre to flaunt their fine feathers in the faces of their neighbors. Half the fun of theatre-going in this community lurks in the fact that you know you are being seen.

Look at the private boxes! Time was when these boxes were in that out carefully curtained off, where you could go incognito, with the world none the wiser. The more conspicuous these boxes are to-day the better are they liked. The private boxes in New York to-day are decollete affairs, warranted to display even the "hang" of a woman's skirt. She sits in her chair, conscious of the fact that she occupies a dominant position. She wears her finest clothes, and it is safe to say that every boxholder in a

over their heads. Nine out of ten theatre-goers read criticisms before going to a play, on the principle that it isn't a good thing to buy a pig in a poke. You can say all you like about criticism (which is open to attack like other good things in this war), but the New York woman has her own pet critic, sticks to him, and abides by his judgment. She knows him, and she could probably tell exactly what he would say at a given performance.

Women in New York can't afford to go and see highly spiced plays. Here we take everything rather seriously—though not as seriously as in England, and, whereas the French woman can be seen with impunity laughing at and commenting upon any style of low-cut farce, it is very different here. Then, again, young girls in Paris are always chaperoned when they go out, and mothers and popper are quite equal to the task of exercising their discretion. In New York girls are not chaperoned. There is a marvellous lack of parental judgment due to the sometimes but not always erroneous fact that the New York maiden can take care of herself. The Young Person is a great institution in New York. She goes everywhere, and it is she who decides whether a play is fit for her mother to see. And this makes the question of plays like "The Turtle" even more serious, and the censor seems to loom up, and say, "Give me a job."

In one of the audiences last week, the men were greatly in excess of the women, and there were—most unfortunately—more than twice as many unmarried as married women. Among the men, those in the autumnal years between thirty-five and fifty were in the majority, although there was a considerable number of masculine theatre-goers under thirty-five.

Men need not be careful. A man can be seen anywhere. But what manager cares to cater to a male community? Half the object of theatre-going is missed if husbands and brothers are unable to take their wives and sisters to the playhouse. Manager know that. The successful stars are those that appeal to the women, like E. H. Sothern and Julia Arthur. The successful plays are those to which the maiden girls flock, like "The Little Minister" and the entertainments at Daly's. It is no use saying that a man's money is as good as a woman's money. It may be while it lasts, but it doesn't last long. Moreover, entertainments labelled "For men only" are unnecessary and needless for, and a censor would see that they were im-

possible. They raise up barriers between the man and his household—barriers that all the King's horses cannot demolish.

Miss Sadie Martinot doesn't undress for the sake of displaying her lingerie to the curious eyes of sisters. She may call her disrobing "poetic," but pretty—even of the Swinburnian culture—is popular with women. They can see a finer display in Fourteenth of Twenty-third street, and such a display on the immobile form of a dummy is far more gratifying. Miss Martinot's exploit appeals solely to the masculine theatre-goers. In the statistics I have mentioned above nobody need be surprised to find that the supply of married women was smaller than that of unmarried women. The married woman who takes her husband to the theatre to see an attractive woman on deshabille is a fool for her pains, and she probably realizes that fact.

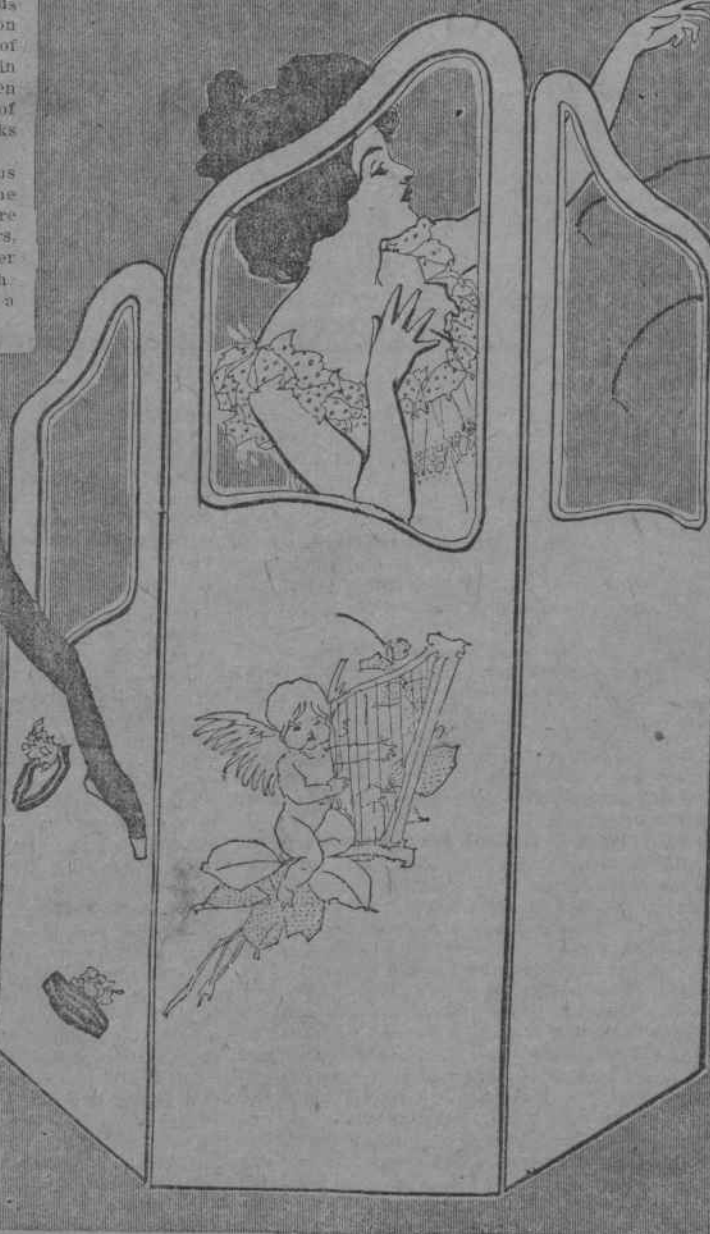
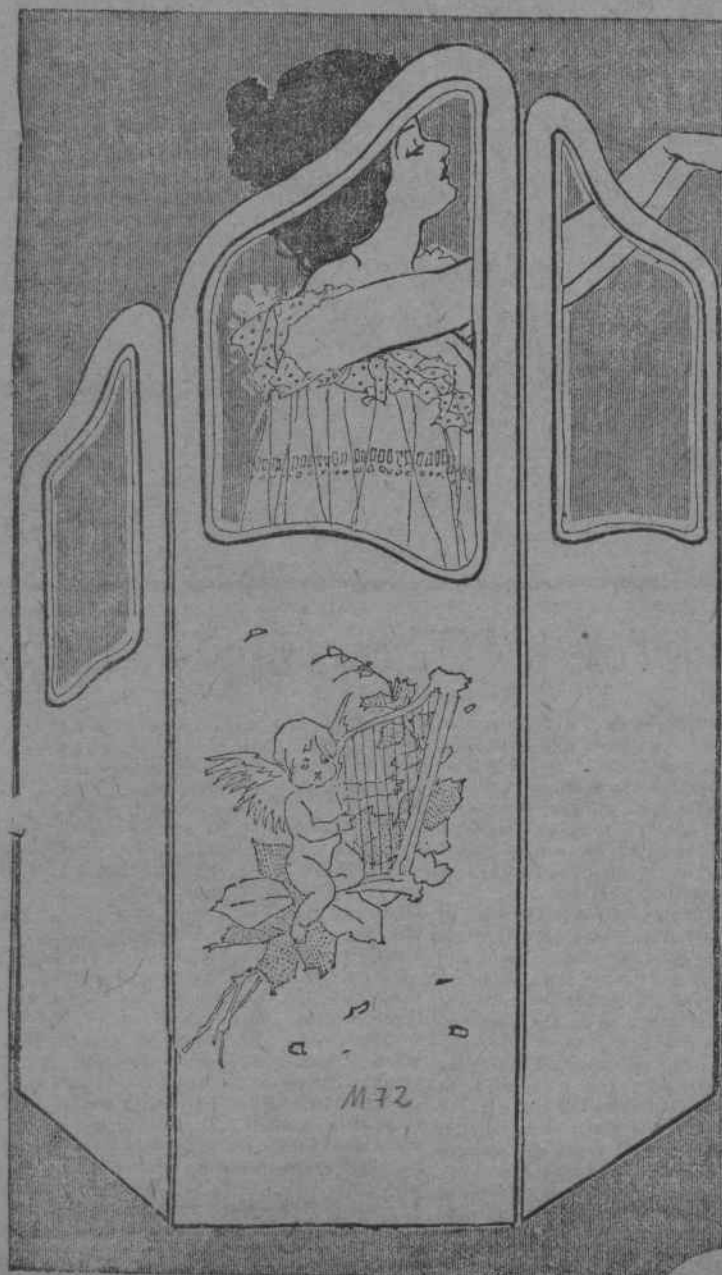
The excess of unmarried women in this particular audience is probably due to the fact that the girls have accepted the invitations of young men to spend an evening at the theatre. Possibly—and we must hope for the best—these young men hardly realized what they were going to see. In good sooth, it must be embarrassing for a young fellow with a spark of decency about his constitution to sit through a piece like "The Turtle" with a girl by his side. The American idea of allowing young men and women to associate on equal terms is undoubtedly a very good one. There is no girl on earth so sensible or so safe as the American girl. But when you get hold of a play like "The Turtle" you wonder if the institution is not a trifle shaky. As a matter of fact it isn't, because there are very few plays like "The Turtle." But if American society were Parisianized, and such pieces came into vogue—which they would do yet awhile—then Playbills would have to go to the theatre with mummer and popper, and Strephon would be forced to rely upon the unsatisfactory comradeship of people of his own sex. The great popularity of theatre-going in America lies in the fact that it offers a charming pastime for the boy and the girl. No harm has ever accrued to the unchaperoned maidens intrusted for a few hours at the playhouse to the boy of her liking. She will probably abstain from "The Turtle," however—unless she wears a thick veil, and Messrs. Brady and Ziegfeld, Jr. realize the necessity of keeping the Manhattan in absolute darkness.

You see, it is really a pity to write saucy things about a place like this. It is its own undoing, but it gives the community a moral spasm, and the censor would guard against this sort of emotion. In a business way—which is the coldest and clumsiest way I can think of—"The Turtle" is a mistake. There are not as many men in this community as there are women, and even if there were it is better for men to go where women can take them. It is the wife who plans the evening's entertainment; it is the woman who goes to the box office to book seats. It is the woman who has her stage favorites and their pet playwrights. It is the woman who plots early dinners and make their theatre evenings. Men are as clay in the hands of their feminine accessories.

The "bald head" audience sounds well, but it is a mistake. The prettiest audience, and the most lucrative audience, is one in which the handsome toilettes of feminine theatre-goers picturesquely abound. The woman here are not prudes by any means. They can stand a good deal, and they are sensible enough to know that the Young Person shouldn't be allowed to claim everything, or to unduly influence playwrights in the conception of natty-banally food.

But "The Turtle" is a play that few women can possibly afford to countenance—however "strong-minded" or "independent" they might be. It must be left for the drummers and town-doers who filter through the city and who clamor for strongly-seasoned food. Perhaps Messrs. Brady and Ziegfeld, Jr., don't mind that. A censor would, for a censor would be the friend of women. A censor would see to it that managers were not permitted to supply "exclusive" entertainments for husbands and brothers. Such plays are the thin end of the wedge that opens the way to domestic disintegration and demoralization. And after that—chance!

ALAN DALE.



## SADIE MARTINOT'S VULGAR DISROBING SCENE—AN EXAMPLE OF THE VICIOUS STAGE PRODUCTIONS WHICH DEMAND A DRAMATIC CENSOR.

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